

**DIOCESE OF CHELMSFORD**

**DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE**



**NEW STAINED GLASS WINDOWS IN CHURCHES**

**GUIDELINES TO ASSIST PARISHES**

Revised March 2013

# NEW STAINED GLASS WINDOWS IN CHURCHES

## I. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 There is a long tradition of stained glass windows in our churches, which stretches back to the centuries when the majority of the population were illiterate. Pictures, illustrations and visual designs were a primary method for teaching people about the Christian faith. Hence, Bible stories, Biblical characters and saints all became favourite subjects. Those who came to worship would be able to stand or sit and the visual images would be fixed in their minds through looking at them week by week.
- 1.2 Although today the general population is literate there is a renewed awareness that visual learning is effective and easy. Consequently, television is known to be more influential than radio or books, and all magazines and newspapers use pictures to convey their messages and stories. Pictures are not just for children. Their impression will last long after the written or spoken word has been forgotten. That the “Word became flesh” is no accident!
- 1.3 In our churches today stained glass windows therefore are very important for both the occasional visitor and the regular worshipper. A representation of Jesus as an insipid, white Anglo-Saxon depressed hippie can leave an image which is less than helpful, and which can destroy all attempts to proclaim a Saviour who grew up in a Mediterranean carpenter’s home, walked thousands of miles and stood up to the might of the religious and political authorities of his day! It is important that we learn from the artistic triumphs and mistakes of previous generations. Great care is needed.
- 1.4 Despite all that, remember that the building, as it currently stands can often talk powerfully to people without the need of conveying a further theological interpretation through the addition of new stained glass. Simplicity can be a great virtue. Stained glass, for better or works, can have a very powerful effect on the interior appearance of a church and the desirability of installing a window should be most carefully considered.

## 2. THE PCC

- 2.1 The PCC should therefore decide exactly why it wishes to add a stained glass window to the church and questions to be addressed should include:
  - a) Why do we want a stained glass window here at all? Consider whether a window should be left with clear glass so that a fine view of a landscape or an attractive tree for example, can still be seen.

- b) Is there a consensus that this project really is a very high priority? Is it more important than, say, new furnishings, lighting, heating or toilet and kitchen facilities? Is it the best use of available money?
- c) What do we want people to take away with them in their minds as a result of seeing this window?
- d) How will this window encourage the Christian mission and worship for which this building exists?
- e) What specific Christian truth or truths do we wish to convey and why?
- f) How will this window be seen to be a natural part of this parish i.e. will it incorporate some aspect of the local environment, the community, its history, or the essence of the place today?
- g) How will the Christian faith be placed in the particular context of this place?
- h) If wording is to be used from Scripture, or from a well-known hymn or from another Christian author, will the words be helpful and understood easily by the occasional visitor, as well as the regular worshipper?
- i) How will this window convey a sense of a living faith today?
- j) Is the message the window conveys clearly expressed?

### **3. PRACTICALITIES**

- 3.1 It is obviously important that any stained glass does not unduly darken the church. Do not assume you have to fill the whole area. Light streaming through clear windows creates a sense of openness and beauty within the church and will help to avoid the intrusiveness of an over-crowded and fussy decoration within a window.
- 3.2 Coloured panels set within a clear glass window can have a strong impact whilst not disturbing the natural light and ambience of the church.
- 3.3 Have regard for the position of the sun at different times of the day, where the window is, who it will be seen by and when, i.e. is it near the font, the pulpit or is it at the back of the church where it will not be seen while people are facing the east end?
- 3.4 Consider the protection needed for such a window. If a lot of money is to be spent then steel wire guards will be required set within the external tracery. Remember too that the artist will design an initial cartoon. This should show any lead comes (the lead joining the various pieces of glass) and horizontal tie-bars which bear the weight of the windows (usually 12"-14" apart and of non-ferrous metal: these should

be similar to those already in other windows). See the separate DAC Guidance Notes on “Church Window Guards” for further information.

- 3.5 Consider whether ventilation is needed for the church, and if, either now or in the future, the window or a part of it should open.

## **4. THE ARTIST**

- 4.1 The PCC will need to arrive at a clear and concise brief for the artist based on the answers it produces for the questions above. Do not be afraid to be bold and innovative in your overall aim. It is extremely important for the PCC to liaise early in the process with the DAC so that advice and guidance is given at an early stage. It is so easy for a committee to try to include every member’s hope for the window and so produce a complex, over-full and muddled set of ideas for the artist. Simplicity is of the essence and as with so much, “less is more” ie one clear theme will be much more helpful than a jumble of interwoven themes.
- 4.2 Offer the brief to two or three artists. They would be expected to visit the church, meet the PCC and suggest at least one idea. The initial visit would normally be free unless the artist has a long journey and will charge for travelling expenses. However, subsequent visits and the design would be chargeable. Do agree at the outset about fees, together with the expected costs for materials, construction, fixing and fitting.
- 4.3 Designing is a highly complex work. The artist will need your clarity, encouragement and co-operation, but must be free to interpret the brief in his or her own way. At first it is unwise to ask for definite designs as the artistic mind tends to become bored by constantly revising an initial design and design can become stilted through repetition.
- 4.4 A finished window looks very different from the cartoon or design on paper, so it is vital that the PCC sees actual examples of the artist’s work in situ as each artist will have a particular style which may or may not be felt to be appropriate.

## **5. MATERIALS**

- 5.1 Coloured glass can be handmade or machine made. Both can have interesting textures and colours, but handmade is more expensive and varied.
- 5.2 Glass can be etched and painted.
- 5.3 Glass may be thin, or more than one layer can be camed together, or it can be deliberately uneven to form prisms.

5.4 There are glass engravers who use texture but not colour, and this may be preferable in modern churches or in internal glass partitions.

## **6. THE DAC**

6.1 Do consult at an early stage. The PCC should not allow itself to be compromised by being offered a preconceived design, even if it is to be a gift, which the DAC may later have to decline to recommend. This will only generate bad feeling locally, especially if a local artist or a local donor is involved.

6.2 Innovative windows can be uplifting but should have at least one aspect, feature or colour which complements other features or styles of the art or architecture already within the church.

6.3 The DAC can offer names of artists who have been used successfully elsewhere in the Diocese, but cannot recommend particular studios. The DAC can also provide the names of other churches where recent stained glass windows have been successfully installed (see winners of the DAC Design Award Scheme in particular).

## **7. USEFUL RESOURCES FOR IDEAS**

7.1 The British Society of Master Glass Painters, 6 Queen Square, London, WC1N 3AR.  
Website: [www.bsmgp.org.uk](http://www.bsmgp.org.uk)

7.2 Helpful books include:

### **Modern Stained Glass in British Churches**

by Mark Angus, Pub. Mowbray 1984

### **Stained and Decorative Glass**

by Elizabeth Morris, Pub. Grange Books 1995

**Engraved Glass** by David Pearce et al.

Books can be ordered through the Diocesan Book Shop Tel. No. 01245 294405

## **POLICY**

1. The window(s) should illustrate the religious symbolism and the theme related to the objective of the commemoration.
2. The location should be appropriate both within the church's architectural setting and be convenient for viewing.
3. A clear brief should be prepared before the artist is invited to design.
4. The artist to be selected should be one whose designs are sympathetic with the church's environment.
5. The DAC should be consulted at the initial stage.

**This is one of a series of guidelines published by the Diocesan  
Advisory Committee**

**Copies can be downloaded from the Diocesan website:**

**[www.chelmsford.anglican.org/parishes/dac/dac\\_notes](http://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/parishes/dac/dac_notes)**

**or can be obtained from the  
DAC Secretary at the address below**

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